

Framework for collaborative scrutiny working between local authorities in Surrey

This framework provides a basis for local authorities in Surrey to work together to carry out scrutiny of decision-makers in so far as their decisions and activities cover strategic and countywide issues.

AIM:

The framework aims to ensure that there is effective scrutiny of strategic countywide issues in Surrey, such as the performance and outcomes of the Surrey Strategic Partnership and delivery against Local Area Agreement targets; and provide a framework for Surrey local authorities to work together to scrutinise issues of common concern, including crime and disorder issues. Effective scrutiny supports the delivery of improved outcomes in terms of the quality of life for residents in Surrey.

Each local authority has a responsibility to put in place its own systems and procedures for carrying out effective scrutiny of decision-making. In addition to this, there are occasions when such scrutiny activity can be more effectively carried out by working collaboratively with others. This is particularly the case in two-tier areas such as Surrey where, for example, national legislation and guidance on the scrutiny of Local Area Agreement improvement targets and crime and disorder matters particularly encourages both tiers to work together. Constructive collaborative working helps to ensure that scrutiny is carried out in the most efficient way, avoiding duplication and making best use of resources – both for those carrying out the scrutiny work and those being scrutinised.

STRUCTURE:

The structure and process for collaborative scrutiny in Surrey is an enhancement to existing arrangements for scrutiny, and does not seek to replace individual local authority overview and scrutiny arrangements.

The process for collaborative scrutiny will be used as and when the need arises, but will be most relevant for decisions and service delivery that has countywide implications and where a range of different partners across the county are responsible for delivery. Therefore currently it is envisaged that it will be primarily used for scrutiny of:

- Surrey Strategic Partnership and its thematic delivery partnerships
- Local Area Agreement improvement targets
- Strategic crime and disorder matters.

Over time this emphasis may shift as the focus for delivery of public services changes.

Outcomes from the scrutiny of these areas will be greatest if all Surrey local authorities are actively involved in delivery of a collaborative scrutiny work programme and given the benefits of working together, it is hoped that all Surrey local authorities will recognise this framework and contribute to making the process a success. However, it will operate as an 'opt-in' arrangement, with individual local authorities able to choose the extent to which they wish to be involved in the process.

The process will be overseen jointly by all Surrey local authorities through a Surrey Scrutiny Co-ordination Group. The work programme developed by this Group for collaborative scrutiny will be 'integrated' into the work of the Surrey County Council overview and scrutiny function that will provide the legal basis for scrutiny activity.

The Surrey Scrutiny Officers Group will play a key supporting role in facilitating use, and further refinement, of the process.

PROCESS:

The process for carrying out collaborative scrutiny work is set out below.

1. Identifying potential issues for collaborative scrutiny

Every year a pan-Surrey event will be held to assist in identifying potential issues for collaborative scrutiny work across Surrey. Invitations to attend will be sent to Surrey County Council scrutiny members, district/ borough scrutiny members and key partner organisations. This will be supported by the provision of information and wider consultation activity to inform discussion.

In addition, potential issues can be raised throughout the year for consideration for inclusion on a work programme.

2. Prioritisation and scoping of collaborative scrutiny work programme

A Surrey Scrutiny Co-ordination Group will be responsible for considering potential issues raised for collaborative scrutiny; identifying suitable topics and prioritising topics within a work programme. The Co-ordination Group will comprise 1 scrutiny member from each of the 12 local authorities in Surrey (representatives to be identified by individual authorities). The Group will also engage with representatives of key partner organisations to assist in its work.

Potential issues for scrutiny will be considered against a set of agreed criteria to identify appropriate strategic and countywide issues for collaborative scrutiny

across Surrey. These issues will then be prioritised to formulate a proposed work programme. Given the resources available to support this work, it is likely that, at least initially, there will be one collaborative scrutiny review undertaken at any one time.

Issues not considered appropriate for inclusion on such a work programme may be:

- An issue of higher priority for a particular sub-group of local authorities. The issue will be referred to those relevant authorities' overview and scrutiny functions for consideration as they determine appropriate. An example of this could be a crime and disorder matter relating to the work of two neighbouring Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. The two respective local authority crime and disorder committees could decide to establish a time-limited joint working arrangement to review that particular issue.
- An issue relating to the area/ remit of one local authority. The issue will be referred to the relevant authority's overview and scrutiny function for consideration as it determines appropriate.
- An issue falling within the remit of another scrutiny body e.g. Surrey Police Authority. The issue will be referred to that body for consideration as it determines appropriate.

The Co-ordination Group will also have an informal role in trying to improve the general co-ordination of scrutiny work across Surrey by facilitating the sharing of work programmes for example.

In developing a programme for collaborative work, it should be noted that this does not preclude any local authority overview and scrutiny function from determining, and carrying out its own scrutiny work on any issues within the remit of its function.

3. Approval of collaborative scrutiny work programme

Where the Surrey Scrutiny Co-ordination Group has identified appropriate topics for countywide review, it will prepare a proposed programme of work. This will include a prioritised list of topics and an initial scoping of the review to be carried out. This scope should indicate reasons for the review; key issues to be addressed; proposals for membership of the task group to carry out the review and which other organisations should be involved; process for the review and potential evidence to be gathered; and how the review will be resourced.

Decisions on such issues will be based on a consensus of member organisations present at the Co-ordination Group meeting.

This proposed programme of work will be presented to the appropriate Surrey County Council Select Committee for approval at the next available meeting.

Unless there are any major concerns from the SCC Select Committee it is hoped that the Committee will feel able to accept the proposals from the Co-ordination Group. That Surrey County Council Select Committee will then provide the legal basis for scrutiny work carried out.

4. Implementation of collaborative scrutiny work programme

In accordance with the approved work programme, time-limited task groups will be established by the appropriate Surrey County Council Select Committee to carry out the collaborative scrutiny work. Membership of task groups will be proposed by the Surrey Scrutiny Co-ordination Group and will include county and district/ borough Members as appropriate to the issue under review and interest in involvement. Representatives of partner organisations will be invited to participate in task groups as appropriate.

Each overview and scrutiny review carried out will result in a report setting out the review's findings and, where appropriate, recommendations for improvement. These recommendations should indicate whom they are addressed to. A copy of the draft report and recommendations will be sent to the Surrey Scrutiny Co-ordination Group for information and to provide an opportunity for it to raise any specific concerns.

5. Consideration of findings of collaborative scrutiny work

The task group's completed report and recommendations will be reported to the 'parent' Surrey County Council Select Committee. The report will be presented by the task group chairman to provide an opportunity for the task group to explain the reasoning for recommendations made and answer any questions from the Surrey County Council Select Committee. Unless there are any major concerns from the Select Committee it is hoped that the Committee will feel able to accept the findings and recommendations of the Task Group that has carried out the work.

6. Presentation of findings of collaborative scrutiny work to decision-makers

Following acceptance by the Surrey County Council Select Committee, the findings and recommendations will be presented to the relevant decision-makers who are responsible for areas affected by the findings or on which recommendations for improvement have been made. Decision-makers will be asked to approve recommendations for implementation. Where recommendations are approved decision-makers will be asked to provide details of how and when they will be implemented. If decision-makers are unable to approve the recommendations they will be asked to provide reasons as to why.

7. Monitoring implementation of approved recommendations

The Surrey County Council Select Committee responsible for a review will undertake regular monitoring of the implementation of approved recommendations. The Surrey Scrutiny Co-ordination Group will be informed of the Committee meeting at which progress will be monitored and the outcomes of the monitoring process. Where implementation, or the outcomes of implementation, is unsatisfactory, the Co-ordination Group may wish to propose further scrutiny of that topic area. A diagram showing the proposed outline of the process for collaborative scrutiny is attached.

COMMUNICATION:

Effective communications will be key to the success of the collaborative scrutiny process. All Surrey local authorities will need to be kept informed and up-to-date on discussions and activity in this area.

The primary method for discussion and communication will be via the Surrey Scrutiny Co-ordination Group, and officers supporting Members on that Group. While it is hoped that all Surrey local authorities will wish to 'opt-in' to the process and play an active role in the Group and the work resulting from it, it is recognised that not all may wish/ be able to do so on a regular basis. In addition, not all authorities will necessarily be actively involved in all collaborative scrutiny work.

Therefore, all Surrey local authorities will be asked to provide a key contact for information relating to this collaborative work stream to be sent to. Individual authorities will be responsible for keeping their own contact details accurate and up-to-date. Information about the annual work programming event, meetings of the Surrey Scrutiny Co-ordination Group and arising collaborative scrutiny work will be copied to each local authority contact to facilitate effective information-sharing and communication.

RESOURCING:

Evidence shows that overview and scrutiny activity is more effective when it has sufficient resources to support its work. Typical activities that will be associated with developing and implementing a collaborative scrutiny work programme will include administration, hosting and organising meetings, carrying out research, preparing reports. Consideration of resource requirements will need to be taken into account when developing a work programme.

Recognising the pressures on local authority budgets it is unlikely that authorities will be able to identify a specific amount of resource to support this scrutiny activity. It is hoped that a proportion of the resource that individual authorities

currently provide to support overview and scrutiny can be used to support the collaborative work that will assist in fulfilling their overview and scrutiny priorities.

Overall, in order to enable a particular piece of collaborative scrutiny work to take place, authorities will have to provide resource on an ad hoc basis e.g. hosting a meeting, carrying out research on a particular topic. If there are not sufficient contributions of resource then it is unlikely that scrutiny will be able to be undertaken.